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March 31, 1961

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

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To: Mr. Dungan
From: L. D. Battle

RM/R File

Please send the attached
material to Mr. Bundy for his
information.

/s/ LDB

Attachment:

Streamlined version of
the paper on "The
Problem of Berlin",
dated March 30, 1961

S/S-RO

MAR 31 1961

A true copy of signed original

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March 30, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGEORGE BUNDY
Special Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: Berlin

As you requested, I attach two copies of a streamlined version of the paper on "The Problem of Berlin" which I sent under memo of March 24. The four annexes have been suppressed, although some of the material in them has, in digested form, been included in the text. Technical references to various possible Western proposals have been eliminated or clarified.

Should the President desire further information about specific proposals or other subjects dealt with more extensively in the longer paper, you may wish to bring appropriate portions of the latter to his attention.

George C. McGhee

Attachment:

Paper on "The Problem
of Berlin". (2 copies)

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THE FISCAL AND POLITICAL

Summary

1. However impelling the urge to find some new approach to the Berlin problem, the facts of the situation strictly limit the practical courses of action open to the West. The history of the Berlin crisis since November 1958 gives little reason for thinking that a lasting settlement can be devised which, under current circumstances, will prove acceptable to both East and West.
2. A vital component of the Western position is the maintenance of a credible deterrent against unilateral Soviet action. Without this the full geographic weaknesses of the Western position in Berlin will have decisive weight in any negotiation. Thought should be given to the possibility of developing and strengthening deterrents other than the pure threat of ultimate thermonuclear war.
3. While we should give further thought to the possibility of providing some all-German "scaffolding" for continuing discussion of the Berlin question with the Soviets, this should be done in awareness of the well-founded fact that any real step towards German reunification can be achieved within the calculable future under circumstances acceptable to the West. It also seems questionable that any all-German approach acceptable to the West will alone suffice to provide the basis for even a temporary solution to the Berlin problem.
4. In planning, therefore, for further negotiations with the Soviets, the Western Powers must prudently expect that they will once again be forced to discuss the question of Berlin in isolation. While a number of possible proposals for an arrangement on Berlin should be further studied to see if they contain the basis for an acceptable settlement, it seems unlikely that any of them will be negotiable with the Soviets or, if negotiable, acceptable to the West.
5. Under certain circumstances, however, the Western Powers might find it desirable to aim at a limited arrangement involving stabilization of existing power structures, allowing for a certain East German role but preserving the essentials of the Western position. Alternatively they might find it necessary to contemplate the execution of their contingency plans.
6. While the Western contingency plans as now developed constitute a highly articulated system of related stages, we must realistically expect the intrusion of unpredictable factors as well as possible efforts by our Allies to respond, under crisis conditions, certain aspects of contingency planning.

Political and Military

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Political and Military Aspects of the Berlin Crisis

Basic Issues

7. The problem of Berlin is one of the gravest and most difficult with which United States policy must cope. Both East and West are so deeply committed to irreconcilable positions, publicly and in terms of basic policy, that the area of possible compromise seems rigidly limited. Berlin's physical isolation and vulnerability are inalterable facts, and the difficulties which arise from them will last, in one form or another, until the Soviets accept the reunification of Germany or the West abandons the city to Communist control.

8. Berlin's importance for the United States is largely intangible but nonetheless undeniable. Since 1948 we have, by our own choice, made Berlin the example and the symbol of our determination and our ability to defend the free parts of the world against Communist aggression. We have frequently reiterated our "guarantee" that we shall treat any attack against Berlin from any quarter as an attack upon our forces and upon ourselves. We have more recently given our commitment a more extended though rather nebulous significance, for example, using such language as not abandoning the free people of Berlin or of not tolerating the unilateral infringement of our rights. The United Kingdom and France have joined us in the basic "Berlin guarantee" and the other NATO powers have associated themselves with it, but it is universally regarded as being meaningful only to the extent that the United States is committed.

9. It is a commonplace that our abandonment of Berlin would be taken as an indication of our unwillingness to meet our defense commitments and thus would have a shattering effect on NATO and our other alliances. This may be an oversimplification.

of a loss of Berlin, regardless of the circumstances, cannot, however, be exaggerated. } The risks

10. The existing situation, while it has many obvious disadvantages, represents a status quo which the West can tolerate pending a solution of the German question in its larger context. Whether the existing situation is also a tolerable status quo for the Soviet Union is a moot question. There are two competing theories as to Soviet objectives:

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(a) that they are using Berlin essentially as a lever to achieve the wider purpose of obtaining recognition of the G.R. and consolidation of the satellite bloc; and (b) that West Berlin is a primary objective in itself because its continuance in its present form is so harmful to the East that it must be eliminated. The truth probably lies in some combination of the two, and the West must presently base its calculations on such an assessment. Berlin is indeed a useful lever with which to attempt to gain broader objectives, whether it be the holding of a Summit meeting, a greater measure of recognition for the GDR, or stabilization of the status quo in Eastern Europe. At the same time, West Berlin's role as a channel for the flow of refugees, as a center of Western propaganda and intelligence activities, and as a show window which daily and dramatically highlights the relative lack of success in the East, is such that the Soviets may feel that they cannot tolerate it for the indefinite future.

11. The essence of the Soviet position as it has developed since November 1958 is that the time is overdue for a peace treaty to be signed with the two German states, or if the Federal Republic refuses, with the GDR alone; that the going into effect of a peace treaty with the GDR will make that country fully sovereign and thus in complete control of the access routes over its territory to and from Berlin; that Berlin is on the territory of the GDR and that the peace treaty will accordingly terminate the Four-Power occupation status of the city; that as an act of grace the GDR and the Soviet Union will join in permitting the establishment of a "free city" of West Berlin; and that, if the West insists, an "interim arrangement" for West Berlin might be made for a specifically limited period of time provided it terminates in the ending of the Western occupation and the creation of a "free city" of West Berlin.

12. To this the Western Powers have responded by stressing the goal of German reunification on the basis of self-determination and holding that a real solution of the Berlin problem can be found only within this context; emphasizing that a meaningful peace treaty can only be signed with a reunited Germany; denying that a so-called peace treaty between the Soviet Union and the GDR can terminate Western rights in Berlin and on the access routes; protesting that Berlin is territory of the GDR; maintaining that acceptance of anything like the so-called "free city" proposal would be tantamount to abandoning West Berlin to the Communists; expressing a willingness to discuss the Berlin question with the Soviets but not under threat of ultimatum; emphasizing Soviet obligation to refrain from unilateral violation of the basic agreements on Berlin; and stressing their intention to protect the freedom of the population of West Berlin.

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The Problem of Deterrence

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The Problem of Deterrence

13. No one will claim that West Berlin is defensible against direct and massive Soviet and/or East German attack. Such attack would, however, become a casus belli under the Western security guarantee. Despite occasional alarms and rumors of Eastern build-up, few expect that, under current circumstances, the Soviets will indulge in such clear aggression.

14. The more urgent question involves the credibility of the basic deterrent which we can bring to bear to prevent the kinds of action which the Soviets are more likely to take or to permit the GDR to take. This question is raised directly by the terminal stages of Allied contingency planning and cuts across the entire confrontation between East and West over Berlin.

15. Given the exposed geographic situation of the city and its tenuous lines of communication, the fact is that, in the last analysis, our position is maintained by the ultimate threat of thermonuclear war. The military measures to reopen access contemplated under Western contingency plans are intended "to take the initiative regarding ground access from the Soviets, provide circumstances in which negotiations with the Soviets might prove fruitful, and compel the Soviets to face the unmistakable imminence of general war". The problem is how can our deterrent, as a refinement of the doctrine of massive retaliation, not suffer from diminishing credibility, given the belief in a so-called thermonuclear balance of terror, continuing rapid change in weapons technology and Soviet anticipation that world pressures would operate against even the firmest resolve on our part to go all the way if necessary.

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17. It may be asked what, under these conditions, really is deterring the Soviets from carrying out their threats. Certainly there would be serious political consequences short of war which the Soviets wish to avoid. There is also a continuing element of uncertainty about how a crisis situation might develop in practice and whether in the last analysis what the Soviets might consider purely rational considerations will actually determine the American decision for war or peace. Although clarity regarding our intentions is generally a virtue, it may be that in the Berlin context such uncertainty adds to the initial deterrent to Soviet action which might set off a possibly disastrous chain of escalation, though at a later stage it may add to the over-all danger of miscalculation.

18. A vital preliminary to any further negotiations with the Soviets on Berlin must be a reaffirmation by the United States, together with its Allies, in the most convincing way possible, of our determination not to collapse in the face of Soviet pressure, a reaffirmation of the very serious danger which Soviet unilateral action would create. To heighten the seriousness of our approach, we should consider whether Soviet interest in eventual achievement of an agreement on disarmament, and in other subjects where both the Soviets and we may have somewhat similar objectives, would help in creating a proper psychological framework for discussion of the Berlin question. It is fair to assume, for example, that the Soviets do not wish to see the United States mobilize its resources behind a greatly enhanced defense program of the type which accompanied the war in Korea, when we quadrupled our defense expenditures. A warning, therefore, that continuation of the Soviet threat to Berlin will inevitably bring the kind of massive mobilization of American resources for defense of which Khrushchev knows we are capable, but which neither we nor he basically desire, might add to our deterrent. The exact timing and level of such an approach to the Soviets should accordingly be considered along with the some specific aspects of a possible moving vivendi on Berlin.

A Position for Possible Four-Power

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A Position for Possible Four-Power Negotiations

General Considerations

19. Any assessment of possibilities in Four-Power negotiations on Berlin must necessarily involve some appraisal of Soviet intentions. It must also be conditioned to some extent by the negotiating history of the question since the present crisis broke in November 1958 and by our knowledge of what our German, French and British Allies are willing to accept. On the Western side the preparation of our position for negotiations with the Soviets has been, and must necessarily continue to be, essentially a Four-Power responsibility.

20. There is no reason to believe that the Soviets are not in deadly earnest about Berlin, whatever the reasons which have impelled them to postpone their so frequently threatened unilateral action. We must presently assume that, at some point in time and in the absence of agreement with the other three occupying powers, the Soviets will feel it necessary to move ahead with their announced intention of signing a peace treaty with the GDR and of abandoning their responsibilities with respect to the West. On the other hand, we may also assume that the Soviets do not wish to engage in all-out nuclear war, or, if they can avoid it, to have a major crisis with a world-wide war scare.

Berlin Solution Within All-German Context

21. If Berlin is at least partially a lever which the Soviets are using to obtain other objectives of more basic importance to them, one might suppose that, if the West could make some proposal which promised movement towards the achievement of at least some of these other objectives, the Soviets might be willing to ease their pressure on Berlin.

22. Our traditional position has, of course, been that the only real solution to the Berlin problem must come within the context of German reunification, yet it is doubtful whether anything can be done at the present time which will really contribute much in a practical sense to the process of achieving German reunification. A great deal of thought and quadripartite diplomatic effort went into the formulation of the Western Peace Plan as put forward at the 1959 Geneva Conference, and it seems unlikely that anything could be added to it which would make it a negotiable basis for a general settlement within which the Berlin question would assume its proper position. All the available evidence points to an overwhelming Soviet disinterestedness in German reunification except on terms unacceptable to the West. On this realistic assumption the problem then boils

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down to whether the West could accept some form of all-German camouflage which might sufficiently serve Soviet interests to obtain from them in exchange a satisfactory Berlin arrangement.

23. Broadly speaking, the theoretically possible proposals which have been suggested in the all-German context fall within the following categories:

a. Various ways of enhancing the status of the GDR, such as permitting all-German talks under cover of a Four-Power group; extending the time period in the Western Peace Plan to seven years during which a Mixed German Committee would operate; tacit recognition of the division of Germany by having a ten or twenty year freeze at the end of which the Germans themselves should work out their own reunification.

b. Various European security arrangements, such as US troop reductions in Germany; limitations on West German armament; zones of inspection or other limited measures in Central Europe.

c. Western acceptance of the Oder-Neisse boundary line as permanent.

d. Soviets proceed to sign peace treaty with GDR but perpetuate procedural status quo as far as Allied access to Berlin is concerned.

24. Although the possibilities in this area are worth further exploration to see whether they are compatible with basic United States interests, there would be little point in going through the travail of trying to get Allied acceptance of any of them unless we believe that they might be negotiable with the Soviets. United States espousal of a position marking a radical breach with past policy, whether in the direction of overt movement towards recognition of the GDR, or in a direction which would be interpreted as involving a fundamental change in U.S. security strategy for Europe, would create a serious crisis within the Western Alliance before it could ever be embodied in proposals to be put forward to the Soviets.

Discussion of Berlin in Isolation

25. We must prudently assume that, at a fairly early point in negotiations with the Soviets, the West may be confronted, as at the Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers in 1959, by the necessity of abandoning discussion of the all-German question and moving on to the problem of Berlin in isolation. An important aspect of the Western position at this point will be the agreed tactical handling of the

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Further discussion with the Soviets, just as in preparing for the 1960 Summit meeting the agreed Western tactics paper in many respects embodied the most important elements of the Western position. In evaluating the various Berlin arrangements which it is possible to devise, the basic alternatives open to the West boil down to four essential types:

a. Some sort of interim arrangement of the kind proposed by the Western Powers at the 1959 Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers;

b. The all-Berlin approach;

c. Some permanent change of status for West Berlin intended to survive until reunification;

d. Some face-saving formula either freezing the situation or permitting the Soviets to proceed with their intention of turning over control of access to the GDR but preserving the essentials of the Western position with respect to freedom of access.

26. It seems likely that, in any negotiations with the Soviets, the subject of an interim arrangement for Berlin will arise as a logical consequence of the 1959 Geneva discussions. The Soviets will probably put forward their version of such an interim proposal to last for a relatively brief period and intended as prelude to achievement of their "free city" objective from which the protective influence of the Western Powers will be substantially eliminated. There is little reason to think that we can reach agreement with the Soviets on an acceptable interim arrangement, although the West might wish to advance certain proposals of this kind.

27. At some point in negotiations, the West might find it expedient for tactical and propaganda reasons to put forward a proposal intended to apply to all of Berlin (including the Soviet sector). Such a proposal was developed quadripartitely in preparing for the Summit Conference of last May, but there is likewise little reason to suppose that it, or anything similar, would actually prove negotiable with the Soviets.

28. Various proposals can be devised involving a change of juridical basis for the Western presence in the city, such as creation of a UN trusteeship for Berlin, the transfer of UN headquarters to Berlin or making Berlin the first World City as capital of the UN, or establishment of a so-called "guaranteed city". The last represents perhaps the most acceptable arrangement on Berlin of this kind which can be formulated, and it is certainly preferable to anything along the lines of the Soviet "free city" proposal. However, it involves many hazards, and its advocacy by the U.S. at the present time would probably cause grave problems within

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the Western Alliance, since it would be interpreted as a sign of weakness and loss of determination to maintain our position in Berlin. While these possibilities should be further studied, we must realistically assume that, for the reasons indicated, they are likely to have little relevance to the next round of discussions with the Soviets.

29. During the course of negotiations the Western Allies may well be faced with the necessity of accepting some sort of accommodation to the de facto situation which execution of the Soviet threat would create. It might, however, be possible to work out some sort of arrangement which would tacitly concede that the Soviets can, whenever they wish, turn over their controls to the GDR, while conceding also that we intend to hang on to the essentials of our position in Berlin. A number of variants are possible and each would depend on the actual situation at the time as to which would be most relevant. One possibility which has been considered quadripartitely in the past is that, if an impasse had been reached at the conference and it seemed that the Soviets would proceed to take unilateral action purporting to end their responsibilities in the access field, the Western Powers might wish to consider making a proposal involving a series of interlocking but unilateral declarations on Berlin access aimed at achieving a freezing of existing procedures, with ultimate Soviet responsibility being maintained, although implementation might be by the East German authorities. This solution first devised by the April 1959 Four-Power London Working Group has survived as an ingenious way of dealing with a situation which may in fact arise whatever the Western Powers may want or do. It is possible to vary its complexity and specific content (for example, by adding similar unilateral declarations on propaganda activity and by introducing a UN role), but the access problem remains its focal point.

Contingency Plans

30. In arriving at decisions at a conference, the Western Powers must, of course, take into consideration the implications of their contingency plans in the event of a complete breakdown of negotiations and the execution of the announced Soviet intention to sign a peace treaty with the GDR and to hand over control of access to GDR officials. The major focus of these plans, given the physical situation of Berlin, has been increased Soviet or GDR interference with freedom of movement between Berlin and the West.

31. Partly at least due to United States initiative, the three Occupying Powers have been able to carry through a thorough review, and a considerable extension, of planning to deal with harassment of access.

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Plans for

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Plans for the earlier stages of a crisis are now reasonably complete but a further development of planning to cover the later stages will be more difficult.

With respect to planning regarding German access, there exists the additional complication that the GDR has long maintained effective control over such access.

22. The assumption of Western contingency planning is that the situation may deteriorate through various stages, for which plans have been outlined, until the Soviets are faced with the imminence of general war. The hope is, of course, that the situation will actually stabilize at an early and still acceptable stage. There are a number of critical points where the Communists might postpone or refrain from further action against Berlin, thus retarding or arresting the development of the situation and giving the Western Powers at least a temporary respite. From the Western point of view, obviously, the earlier the break-off point is reached the better. Apart from these possible sticking points, a realistic evaluation will allow for intrusion of the unforeseen and the unpredictable as the crisis becomes graver and the pressures of public opinion mount.

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